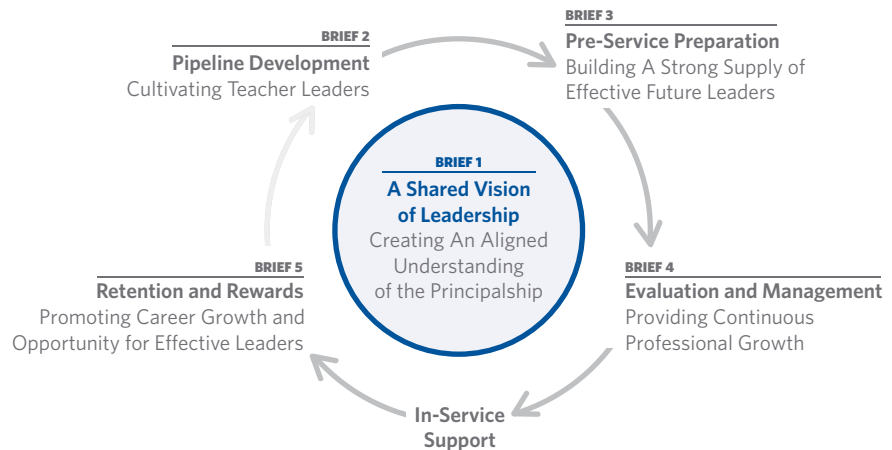


# A SHARED VISION OF LEADERSHIP: CREATING AN ALIGNED UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Accounting for a quarter of a school's impact on student achievement, principals are the leverage point for education reform and the primary drivers of school improvement. School leaders have a greater influence on all students than teachers and are the best long-term investment in effective teaching at scale.



## THE CHALLENGE: A CHANGING PRINCIPAL ROLE

The role of the principal is rapidly changing. Once seen as building managers tasked with bus schedules and student discipline, principals now lead a range of school-level reform efforts. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, “heightened accountability requirements under which schools operate have significantly increased the complexity of the work of the principal.”<sup>1</sup>

But not all principals are equipped to lead dramatic student achievement gains or know which actions to prioritize. Research on school leaders in urban areas demonstrated that principals only spent between 8 to 17 percent of their time on instructional leadership activities because they found it difficult to carve out time for improving instruction and they were unsure which actions offered the most promise.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, research indicates which principal actions can amplify great teaching and increase student achievement. Through an in-depth analysis of more than 200 public schools, New Leaders found that the most effective principals took action in three intersecting areas: as **instructional leaders**, principals support teachers in improving classroom instruction; as **talent managers**, principals manage staff (such as recruiting, hiring, developing, and retaining exceptional talent), build learning communities, and provide ongoing feedback; and as **culture builders**, principals create great places to work and learn.<sup>3</sup> Together, these three areas define the role of the principal.

For more information on how these roles focus principal actions in supporting great teaching, please see New Leaders’ publication entitled *Playmakers: How Great Principals Build and Lead Great Teams of Teachers*.

## THE SOLUTION: A SHARED VISION OF GREAT LEADERSHIP

In order to support states and local educational agencies (LEAs) in advancing the principalship—including investing time, focus, and resources in the role—federal policymakers should:

- **Sharpen the focus on leadership;**
- **Improve the use of existing resources;**
- **Encourage alignment of human capital policies to a new vision of leadership;**
- **Support the conditions that allow principals to be effective; and**
- **Invest in a learning agenda.**

### SHARPEN THE FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP

**I | Make a clear differentiation between teachers and principals in major federal programs.** In order to support a focus on both teachers and principals, create separate priorities in competitive grant programs and differentiate set-asides. Separating teachers and principals will highlight the distinct and important roles that each play and recognize the primary role of principals in supporting teacher effectiveness.

Vehicles:

- **Amend** or initiate a **rulemaking** process on various grant programs—such as the Investing in Innovation Fund (i3), the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program, the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), and the Race to the Top-District (RTT-D) competition—to include separate priorities for programs to train or support principals, including those preparing for principal roles.
- **Amend** Title II of ESEA to increase the state-level reservation of Title II-A funds and set aside at least half of the reservation specifically for principal effectiveness activities.
- **Monitor** the progress of states and LEAs by tracking spending on principal effectiveness as distinct from spending on non-principal related initiatives that also improve teacher effectiveness. By collecting data on how states and LEAs spend their Title II funds separately on both teachers and principals, policymakers can encourage practitioners to reflect on the best use of funds and collect important data to inform future policies.

There are a number of vehicles federal policymakers can use to **create or encourage effective leadership policies**. Throughout this series we will describe an ideal policy and then suggest potential vehicles policymakers could use to pursue that policy.

#### Authorizing Statute

The legislative branch can amend current laws—such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or the Higher Education Act (HEA)—or pass new laws to establish programs and authorize federal spending levels.

#### Appropriations Priorities

The legislative branch can set aside federal funds for a specific use and fund priority programs.

#### Regulations

The executive branch can initiate a rulemaking process based on existing legislative language through an executive authority or regulatory agency.

#### Executive Actions

The executive branch can provide guidance and technical assistance on problems of practice. And it can (along with the legislative branch) elevate concepts through the bully pulpit.

**2 | Use the bully pulpit to speak about the importance of great leadership.** Champion the power of the principal through high-profile communications, the bully pulpit, and prominent convenings. As former students, many of us have experienced great teaching—a teacher that put us on a fundamentally different life path. But many of us were unaware of the principal’s role in setting the conditions for that teacher to succeed. A great principal provides vision and support that enables all teachers in the building to help children reach their potential. Communications can highlight how an investment in principals is also an investment in great teaching. High-profile conversations also encourage a new generation of professionals to seek school leadership positions.

Vehicles:

- **Speak** often and at the highest levels about the importance of school leadership. Members of Congress, Administration officials, and other high-profile policymakers can find opportunities to share the message with various audiences.
- **Convene** states and LEAs to collaborate on solutions to a variety of principal effectiveness challenges, including recruiting, preparing, and supporting principals for our highest-need schools.

## IMPROVE THE USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES

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**3 | Focus existing federal investments in principals.** The current list of allowable activities in ESEA Title II-A does little to focus states and LEAs on the most effective uses of funds. Federal policymakers can encourage better uses of formula funds by updating the list of activities to focus more tightly on effective activities in the following categories: principal pipeline development; preparation and licensure; evaluation and support; and retention and rewards. Funds can also be set aside for competitions that will inform more effective use of formula funds.

Vehicles:

- **Amend** Title II-A of ESEA to streamline the existing allowable activities focused on recruiting, preparing, evaluating, developing, and retaining principals who serve as instructional leaders, talent managers, and culture builders. Then, provide **technical assistance** on how to use the funds most effectively.
- **Amend** Title II-A of ESEA to shift a portion of funds from formula funding to national activities funding for competitive grants to states, LEAs, and their partners, in order to seed innovative practices. Use performance-based funding to drive additional resources to and expand the reach of grantees with strong results while not renewing grants with poor results.

**4 | Incent states to revise leadership standards.** State leadership standards should focus principals on increasing teacher effectiveness and improving student outcomes. Many current standards lack specificity and focus, are overly complicated, and reflect an outmoded vision for school leadership. New standards must be short, evidence-based, and actionable, as well as define the principal’s role as instructional leader, talent manager, and culture builder.

Vehicles:

- **Amend** Title II-A of ESEA to allow states to use funds to revise leadership standards that reflect a new vision for school leadership.
- Provide **technical assistance** on updating standards to focus principals on their important roles.

## ENCOURAGE ALIGNMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL POLICIES TO A NEW VISION FOR LEADERSHIP

**5 | Revise human capital policies to reflect alignment of new vision.** In order to reinforce the new vision for principals established in revised state leadership standards, states and LEAs must ensure that this vision is reflected across relevant human capital policies. Hiring and selection are often overlooked levers for ensuring great principals. States can create model job descriptions and recruitment practices that reflect new principal expectations and selection tools that incorporate performance tasks to measure candidates' abilities to reach those standards. LEAs would not have to recreate the wheel and could instead voluntarily adopt or adapt model practices.

Vehicle:

- **Invest** in innovative states and LEAs that plan to align human capital policies to strong leadership standards (e.g., the **Teacher Incentive Fund** (TIF)). Grantees should develop model job descriptions for various positions in a school's leadership team, including teacher leader, assistant principal, and principal. They can also develop strategies for recruiting strong candidates from a diverse talent pool and create performance-based principal hiring tools that match a principal's skills with a school's needs. *(Note: TIF is a competitive grant program that funds the development and implementation of performance-based teacher and principal compensations systems in high-need schools.)*

**6 | Ensure alignment to evaluation and support systems.** Discussed more fully in the evaluation and management brief, ensure evaluation and support policies reinforce the same vision for effective leadership outlined in state leadership standards.

Vehicle:

- **Invest** in innovative states and LEAs that plan to align principal evaluation and support systems to revised leadership standards. For more information on this topic, please see the brief entitled "**Evaluation and Management: Providing Continuous Professional Growth.**"

## SUPPORT THE CONDITIONS THAT ALLOW PRINCIPALS TO BE EFFECTIVE

**7 | Encourage a culture of collective responsibility, balanced autonomy, and continuous improvement.** At the local-level, school leaders can be more effective in LEAs that promote a culture of collective responsibility in reaching student academic outcomes. This culture fosters balanced autonomy—where principals have discretion to implement local, state, and federal initiatives in a manner that meets the unique needs of their schools without compromising the essential components of the policy or practice. In addition, the most successful LEAs are learning organizations that solicit feedback to improve. Within a culture of balanced autonomy, principals need decision-making authority to effectively manage talent at the school level. This staffing authority—the ability to hire, promote, and dismiss teachers and other school-based staff—is perhaps the most important and commonly lacking condition for principal effectiveness. Federal policies can encourage states and LEAs to establish the necessary conditions for principals to be effective. For more information, please see New Leaders' forthcoming publication entitled *Great Principals at Scale: Creating District Conditions that Enable All Principals to be Effective*.

Vehicles:

- Initiate a **rulemaking** process to provide priority and preference points in competitive grant competitions to entities that provide balanced autonomy to principals, including staffing authority (e.g., LEAs that break down existing central office barriers to provide principals with the authority to effectively manage talent).
- **Amend** or initiate a **rulemaking** process to set eligibility criteria for various state- or LEA-level grant competitions (e.g., **Race to the Top** (RTT)) such that states must thoughtfully remove barriers to balanced principal autonomy in order to be eligible (e.g., states that remove staffing formulas which regulate the positions for which principals can hire or remove salary limitations based solely on years of experience).

## INVEST IN A LEARNING AGENDA

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**8 | Support research and disseminate best practices.** Fund the collection of and research into practices and strategies implemented by principals in high-performing and fast-improving schools. Capture, learn from, and share these effective principal practices. Use these findings to revise existing federal policy.

Vehicles:

- **Invest** in a robust research agenda to understand the practices of highly-effective school leaders through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) or other entities.
- **Research** various ways to structure school leadership in the future, such as models that split the role of the principal (e.g., the **School Administration Manager (SAM)** project).
- **Disseminate** best practices by developing case studies, tools, and other resources.

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  3. Adams, E., Ikemoto, G., & Taliaferro, L. (2012). *Playmakers: How Great Principals Build and Lead Great Teams of Teachers*. New York, NY: New Leaders. Retrieved from <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/playmakers/>